State in the assessment of students in Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia in the light of research on social capital

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to evaluate the perception of the state by students in the context of research on social capital. The paper uses the results of a survey conducted at the Faculty of Economics and Management University of Szczecin, Faculty of Politics and Management Mykolo Romeris University in Vilnius and Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University Banska Bystrica Theoretical part of the article presents chosen issues concerning social capital in relation to the state. This part has also become a foundation to the analysis of the survey outcomes conducted among students in Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia. It was preceded by presentation of research methodology. The article presents conclusions regarding the assessment of the state by students in Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia in the context of democracy, social participation, trust and social norms.

Keywords: *social capital, state, democracy, trust, social activity.*
Raktažodžiai: *socialinis kapitalas, valstybė, demokratija, pasitikėjimas, socialinė veikla.*

Introduction

The major aim of the paper is the assessment of student relationships in Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia to the state in the light of research on social capital. Several aspects have been taken into account. First, the student-to-democracy ratio, as the principal institution of the countries in which research was conducted. It gives

citizens the possibility of direct or indirect (through elected representatives) the exercise of power. Secondly, the student's social activity gives students a broad opportunity to cooperate and build networks of interpersonal connections in order to achieve common goals. Thirdly, it puts students' trust in central and local government authorities. It gives a sense of predictability in the relationship between the citizen and the state necessary to take joint action. Fourthly, students' perception of the honesty of central employees and self-government institutions of the state. Honesty creates social attitudes without fear of the purity of relationships while raising the level of mutual trust; and fifthly, the creation of social solidarity by state institutions expressed by helping others. Social solidarity of the individual means that it subordinates its selfish interest to the social interest.

Undoubtedly, the selection of the countries in which the research was conducted is interesting because of their recent history of political and economic change. Studying social capital is particularly important in the context of institutional conditioning. Furthermore, such research seems to be of interest in the context of the economic crisis of the early 21st century, which, apart from the economic dimension, can be attributed to the social dimension, manifested by political instability amongst other.

The article consists of several parts. After the introductory words, the theoretical part discusses the issues of social capital, including issues concerning the state. After presenting the research methodology analysis of the results of the research conducted on the group of students of the Faculty of Economics and Management University of Szczecin, Faculty of Politics and Management Mykolo Romeris University in Vilnius nad Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University Banska Bystrica was presented in the empirical part. The data used are part of broader research on the social capital of students. The method of target selection used was based on the assumed research goals, ie the definition of social capital among first year students[12]. The formulated proposals concern the studied groups of students.

Social capital, state – selected theoretical issues

The issue of social capital is analyzed by researchers in many disciplines of science (Lin, 2001, Pooley, Cohen, Pike, 2004, Roberts, 2004, in: Hawkins, Maurer, 2010, p. 1778). At least four broad approaches to the concept of social capital may be distinguished. The anthropological literature is the source for the notion that humans have natural instincts for association. The sociological literature describes social norms and the sources of human motivation. It emphasises features of social organisation such as trust, norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement. The economic literature draws on the assumption that people will maximise their personal utility, deciding to interact with others and draw on social capital resources to conduct various types of

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12 Research will be repeated in the third year of study to show whether there has been a change in student social capital within three years.

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group activities (Glaeser, 2001, in: *The Well-being of Nations...*, OECD, 2001, p. 40). Social capital focuses on broadening the vision of economists to include some other intangible resources to what they were used to thinking about —capital (Lollo, 2002, p. 2). A strand in the political science literature emphasises the role of institutions, political and social norms in shaping human behaviour. Yet, while the concept of social capital enjoys an expanding popularity in interdisciplinary research, conceptual ambiguity and misspecification persists (Tzanakis, 2013, p. 2). There are many definitions attached to the concept which leads to justifiable confusion about what constitutes social capital. This has been exacerbated by the different words used to refer to the term. These range from social energy, community spirit, social bonds, civic virtue, community networks, social ozone, extended friendships, community life, social resources, informal and formal networks, good neighbourliness and social glue.

The concept of social capital may first have appeared in a book published in 1916 in the United States that discussed how neighbours could work together to oversee schools. Author Lyda Hanifan (Hanifan, 1916, pp. 130-138) referred to social capital as "those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit". In the following years, a number of studies have been developed to address the issues of social capital. The growing interest in social capital stems, in part, from empirical evidence about the role of networks and norms of mutual support in contributing to higher quality community governance as well as economic as well as social and personal development (Healy, 2002, pp. 2-3). However, in the wealth of literature on the subject, special attention should be paid to such characters as P. Bourdieu, J. Coleman, F. Fukuyama and R. Putnam, whose work contributed to increasing the popularity of social capital.

Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1980, pp. 2-3, Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248) defined the concept of social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition". The idea that membership in social networks can bring access to valuable resources – material or otherwise – is central to much of the social capital literature. However, Bourdieu's emphasis was very much on the use of social networks to exclude non-members and to prevent social mobility (Scrivens, Smith, 2013, p. 13). Bourdieu sees clear profit as being the main reason that actors engage in and maintain links in a network. That profit is not necessarily economic, but according to Bourdieu, it can be reducible to economic profit. Social capital along with other forms of associated capitals explain the structure and dynamics of differentiated societies (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 119).

Coleman proposes a model in which social capital is one of the potential resources which an actor can use, alongside other resources such as their own skills and expertise (human capital), tools (physical capital), or money (economic capital). Coleman (Coleman, 1988, p. 98) considers that social capital is defined by its func-

tion. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure". The denser the network of unit relationships, the greater the potential or real resources of this capital. Thanks to participation in the network, the individual receives access to information channels, which allow, for example, to reduce the costs of certain activities (Theiss, 2007, p. 1). Thus Coleman (Coleman, 1990) highlights that social capital indicates the resources, real or potential, gained from relationships. In other words, it is a public good, and as public good, it depends on the willingness of the members of the community to avoid free riding. For this purpose, norms, trust, sanctions and values become important in sustaining this collective asset (Andriani, 2013, p. 4).

On the other hand, for Fukuyama, social capital is "a set of informal values and ethical norms (eg, charity) common to members of a particular group that enable them to cooperate effectively" (Fukuyama, 1997, in: Klimczuk, 2012, p. 70). It allows to create relationships between people, to set up groups, associations and institutions of civil society. Social capital is created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms: religion, tradition, historical habit (Fukuyama, 1997, p. 39). Fukuyama pays special attention to the trust that creates a favorable climate for the growth of social capital. The radius of trust "is the circle of people among whom co-operative norms are operative" (Fukuyama, 2011, p. 8). According to Fukuyama, a modern society can be represented as a set of "concentric and overlapping radius of trust" ranging from families, friends, religious groups, NGOs and so on. Fukuyama attempted to compare the relative economic performance of different nations and cultures on the basis of differing levels of trust. It is this level of trust inherent in a given society that conditions its prosperity and degree of democracy, as well as its ability to compete economically (Passey, 2000, p. 8).

Putnam's conception of social capital emphasised that it is a public good and defined it in terms of networks of civic engagement, trust and norms of reciprocity, which can increase the efficiency of society (Putnam, 1995, p. 258). Trust is defined as "the climate of cooperation" (Theiss, 2007, pp. 16-17), which strengthens co-operation, and cooperation strengthens further trust in the positive spiral of cooperation and engagement (Rymsza, 2007, p. 31). Putnam distinguishes between bonding social capital and bridging social capital. The preceding is formed in communities (such as families and friends) where the bonds between members are inclusive. These communities strive to develop their own values or ideas and are pessimistic about implementing others. The bridging social capital, on the other hand, is formed in groups oriented outwards. They form outward looking ties characteristic of heterogeneous groups such as acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours. They are essential for "making progress" in the community (Putnam, 2008). Because the units are organized into groups, individuals are more productive and bring benefi ts for other entities and the community (Nagaj, Žuromskaitė, 2016, p. 129).

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There appears to be a convergence of views around the central importance of the following four key dimensions in guiding attempts to measure social capital (*The measurement of social capital at international level*, 2002, pp. 2-3):

   a) political participation, encompasses aspects of active civic engagement and interaction. Engagement may also be linked to prevalence of trust in political structures and institutions;
   b) community involvement refers to formal networks in the community – typically in a broad "civil society" context (e.g. membership of residents' associations);
   c) informal networks/sociability, informal networks encompass social support networks, family relationships and informal sociability;
   d) trust, norms and sanctions, trust describes a belief about the good intentions and expected behaviour of others. Trust arises from experience of other people's trustworthy actions as well as innate or socially determined views about others. Underlying trust and trustworthy behaviour are norms and sanctions associated with reciprocal behaviour. They reflect shared ethical views and cumulative inter-personal obligations and expectations.

The issue of social capital undertaken in this research is considered in the context of the relation of young people (students) to the state. The last decade of the twentieth century was for countries in which revolutionary research was conducted. Recovering sovereignty, shaping the new political and economic order fundamentally changed their character. Public space has been opened to the various civic initiatives. However, it must be noted that it has been a quarter of a century since those revolutionary changes. At that time, there was an exchange of generations and students participating in the study entered adulthood among others. For them, the political system in which their parents or grandparents were is history. However, the memory of these times is still present. It is undoubtedly selective and subject to various modifications under the influence of current experience, on the other hand, the memory of those times can create attitudes towards current events (Assman, 2006, Mahoney, Schensul, 2006, van Beek, Lategan, 2006).

By adopting a definition of the state by G. Jellineka (Kostrubiec, 2002, pp. 375–382) as a system of three components: the society (citizens), the territory and the authority of the analysis of the empirical, in the light of research on social capital, subjected two of them. When analyzing the public, data on formal social activity were provided: activities in non-governmental organizations and local community meetings. Through a network of collaboration and cooperation or the creation of infrastructures for public communication, social activity enables the achievement of common goals. It is undoubtedly dependent on the degree of civil liberties and the rule of law, whose compliance by public authorities creates the activity of citizens for the common good (Ahn, Hemmings, 2000, p. 51). Creating civic attitudes leads to increased identification of individuals with the community, a sense of common good and, consequently, intensification of collective and individual actions aimed at

realizing values connected with the notion of common good (Sztumski, 1997, p. 16). Excessive public power that prevents social activity brings about the degradation of social capital.

When analyzing in the context of social capital, the second element of the state, ie power, uses the data on students' attitudes towards democracy, trust in the authorities, assessing the honesty of central and local government employees and creating their social norms. Democracy allows students to co-decide on the issues that concern them and not just be passive recipients of what is happening to the state and their social activity. Undoubtedly, the attitude of students to democracy is dependent on trust in the state. The principle of trusting citizens to the organs of the state is considered to be a brace that breaks the whole of the general rules of conduct (Skrenty, 2013, p. 98). This trust is the result of, among others, adherence to authority, regardless of degree, social norms, such as honesty. The conviction of individuals about the state's compliance with social norms should result in a deepening of citizens' trust in the state (public trust), thus eliminating the uncertainty of joint action. Equally important for the building of social capital is the creation of social solidarity by the state institutions by helping others, for example. Social solidarity is the norm of social responsibility, it is a certain ontic principle of social life, which defines relationships in a given community (Guz, 2009, p. 77). Feeling solidarity with other people pulls the individual from the circle of privacy and allows oneself to cross selfishness (Kochman, 2009, p. 1).

Metodology

The survey was conducted within statutory research funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, entitled Knowledge and social capital[13]. Statistical research using a questionnaire survey was carried out among bachelor's degree students of the 1st year studying at the Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Szczecin (n=239), Faculty of Politics and Management Mykolo Romeris University in Vilnius (n=113) and Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University Banska Bystric (n=153). The aim of the research imposed employment of purposive sampling: to prepare a description of social capital, among students of the first year of the studies[14]. The survey was based on a paper questionnaire consisting of two parts: demographics and a set of questions concerning social capital. The questions about social capital were developed according to a logical model proposed by the World Bank (Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, Woolcock, 2004). This part of the questionnaire consisted of 36 closed- and open-ended questions regarding social capital (Milczarek, Miłaszewicz, Nagaj, Szkudlarek, Zakrzewska, 2015, p. 95). For the purpose of the analysis the author selected ten questions concerning the students' attitude toward to the state.

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13 Survey number: 503-2000-230-342.
14 the survey will be repeated in the third year of the studies.

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Research results

The key institution of the countries in which the research was conducted is democracy. Figure 1 shows data on students' perceptions of this form of political system, or the form of exercising public authority.
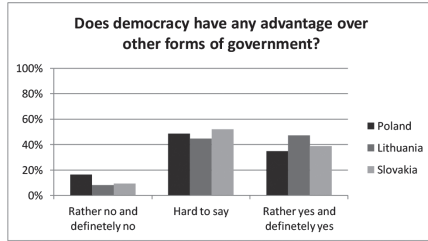
Figure 1. **Democracy in students' assessment**

Source: own research.

The study shows that, is often difficult for students to say whether democracy has an advantage over other forms of government (Slovakia 52.0%, Poland 48.7%) or express the view of the superiority of this form of power to others (Lithuania 47.3%). What is important in each of the least states is the percentage of students expressing the view that democracy has no advantage over other forms of government (Lithuania 8.0%, Slovakia 9.2%, Poland 16.3%). Thus it is generally accepted that students accept the form of the political system of the state in which they live. The ability to co-decide on the issues that affect them is the foundation of building social capital.

Democracy provides broad opportunities for social activity, both formal and informal, as one of the dimensions of social capital. In the paper it was presented as an example of the participation of students in non-governmental organizations and in local community meetings (see Figure 2).
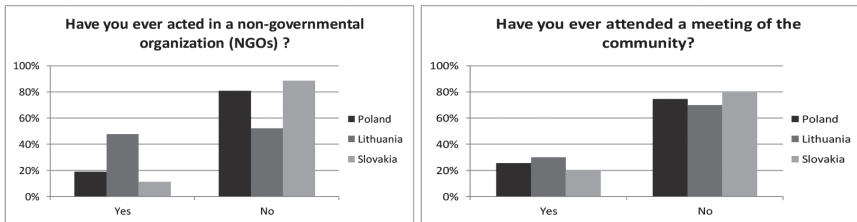
Figure 2. **Participation of students in a non-governmental organizations and in local community meetings**

Source: own research.

Unfortunately, most students admit that they have never worked in a non-governmental organization. Against the background of other participating countries, only students in Lithuania can be distinguished, with 47.8% taking part in such a form of social activity. In Poland this percentage is only 19.0% and in Slovakia only 11.3%. The results also show that students rarely participate in local community meetings. 20.3% of students in Slovakia, 25.5% of students in Poland, 30.1% of students in Lithuania show this form of social activity. Thus, formal social activity, as a dimension of social capital, is at a very low level.

It is important for students to evaluate the perception of the state that trust public authority, whatever its level (see Figure 3).
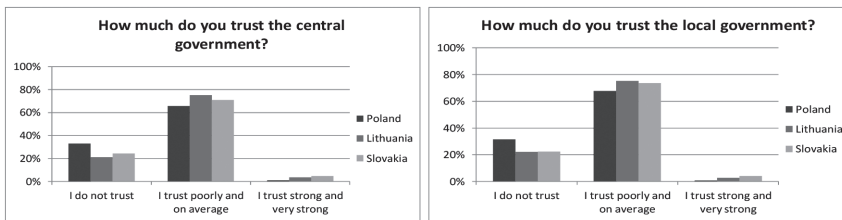

Figure 3. **Students' trust to central and local government**

Source: own research.

Public trust, which defines a fairly explicit relationship between students and the state, is a key dimension of social capital. Unfortunately, the results of the research indicate a fairly low level of student trust in the central government. Students in each of the three countries generally have poor and average trust in them (Poland 65.8%, Slovakia 71.1%, Lithuania 75.2%). Moreover, in all countries, the percentage of students indicating a lack of trust in the central authorities definitely exceeds the percentage of students, those who firmly and very strongly trust this authority. Students also have low or average trust in local government (Poland 67.7%, Slovakia 73.7%, Lithuania 75.2%). What is also important is that students more often point to total distrust of local government than strong or even very strong trust. Thus, the very low level of students' public trust, which is one of the dimensions of social capital, should be negatively assessed.

It is important to build social capital for preserving certain social norms. In this dimension of social capital that students also rated the state, taking into account the honesty of central and local government employees and the creation of their attitude towards helping others (see Figure 4).
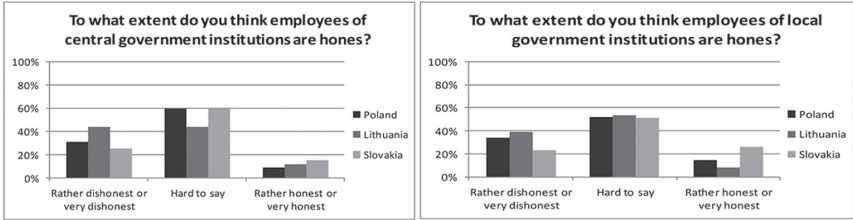
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Figure 4. *Evaluation of students' trust of central and local government employees of state institutions*

Source: own research.

The results of the study indicate that it is difficult for students to assess the honesty of employees of central state institutions (Slovakia 59.5%, Poland 59.7%), or they show a lack of integrity (Lithuania 44.1%). In addition, in each country, the proportion of students pointing to the dishonesty of central government employees exceeds student shares, who sees such honesty. Also the honesty of local government employees most often cannot unequivocally be assessed (Slovakia 51.0%, Poland 51.7%, Lithuania 53.2%). Importantly, students in all states are more likely to point to dishonesty than the integrity of self-employed workers. Thus, one can judge that the state does not fulfill the social norms that underlie social capital in this respect.

The groups of students participating in the study are no longer so unanimous in the assessment of the state institutions' creation of attitudes aimed at helping others as social capital norms (see Figure 5).
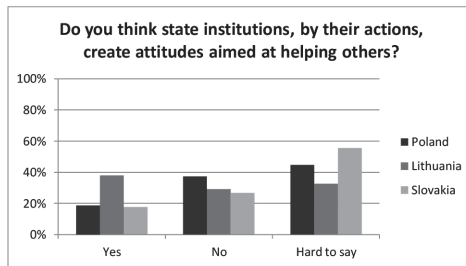

Figure 5. *Evaluation of students creating public attitudes aimed at helping others*

Source: own research.

In the case of students in Poland (44.7%) and in Slovakia (55.6%) prevails the view that it is difficult to point out the actions of state institutions that create the attitude of social solidarity. The smallest of these is the participation of students in Slovakia (17.6%) and in Poland (18.7%), who are aware of such activity of the

state. Students in Lithuania are of another opinion. Among them prevails the view (38.1%), the actions of state institutions create an attitude aimed at helping others. In turn, the share is smallest of the group of students who do not see such activity in the state at all (29.2%). Thus, the potential for the creation of social capital by the state regarding social dimension is also underestimated.

Conclusions

An analysis of the students' relationship to the state in Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia in the context of research on social capital, allows drawing several key conclusions.

1. It is important to assess the students' general attitude to democracy as a key institution for the countries in which students live. Students from Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia generally accept democracy as a form of the political system in the country where they live. It is very important because the ability to co-decide on the issues that affect them is the foundation of building social capital.

2. There is no doubt that democracy requires civic involvement. Unfortunately, in the formal dimension it is at a low level. Students rarely attend non-governmental organizations and community meetings. Thus, the idea of membership in formal social networks is not practiced among students. Perhaps they do not see the benefits of participating in such forms of social activity. As a result, they have no opportunity to learn and experience organised social activity and develop skills essential for living in a civil society.

3. In the context of research on social capital it is crucial to assess the level of students' public trust. Students are usually cautious about central and local government institutions which are, in fact, the most crucial element if a democracy. They declare limited trust in those institutions. This applies both to central and local government. And yet this is the foundation of any civil society and social capital in the citizen–state dimension.

4. It should be also pointed out that students have very low opinion of honesty of the employees of the state institutions and their ability to create social solidarity must be assessed at a low level. This negative opinion among the students of the state in terms of social norms is an extremely valid barrier to developing social capital.

5. The research results clearly indicate that the younger generation in Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania faces important barriers which may impede their willingness to collaborate with the state's institutions for the common good. It seems therefore essential to further explore this topic in order to identify the reasons behind these attitudes towards the state among young people.

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Piotr Szkudlarek

Lenkijos, Lietuvos ir Slovakijos studentų požiūris į savo šalį socialinio kapitalo tyrimų kontekste

Šio straipsnio tikslas yra įvertinti studentų požiūrį į savo šalį socialinio kapitalo tyrimų kontekste. Straipsnyje buvo panaudoti anketinių tyrimų duomenys, atlikti Ščecino universiteto Ekonomikos ir vadybos fakultete, Vilniaus Mykolo Romerio universiteto Politikos ir vadybos fakultete, Bystricos Matej Bel universitete. Teorinėje straipsnio dalyje apžvelgiama socialinio kapitalo problematika, atsižvelgiant į šalių ypatumus. Tai tapo pagrindu anketinių tyrimų duomenų analizei, atliktų studentų tarpe. Prieš atliekant apklausą, buvo pristatyta tyrimo metodika. Straipsnyje yra suformuluotos kelios esminės išvados, susijusios su Lenkijos, Lietuvos ir Slovakijos studentų savo šalies suvokimu, susijusiu su demokratija, socialiniu dalyvavimu, pasitikėjimu, socialinėmis normomis ir bendra valstybinių institucijų veikla.

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